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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

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National Intelligence Officers

SP - 32/82
2 April 1982
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: National Intelligence Officer for Strategic Programs

SUBJECT: Prevailing in Nuclear War

1. I am enclosing the specific discussions in the Key Judgments of NIE 11-3/8-81 that bear on the issue of whether the Soviets would be able to prevail in a nuclear conflict. I think it quite likely that at some point the media will claim that the Estimate suggests the Soviets could win such a war. We do not make such a claim. Our key statements on the matter are:

- Paragraph 25
- Paragraph 31, last sentence
- Paragraph 66, first sentence
- Paragraph 67, first sentence
- Paragraph 68

2. I believe that there is nothing we can do to avert such a charge, if someone wants to make it. We can be unfairly charged with having created the impression of Soviet potential for victory in such a war, because of the treatment of Soviet force operations in the stages of conflict we laid out from analyzing their strategic force exercises.

3. I think we are in a strong position to defend the message of the Estimate, and how our strategic policy is supported by it. The US nuclear force posture -- weapons, command and control, and force employment plans -- today are designed to deter the Soviets, not ourselves, from going to nuclear war. This was clearly expressed toward the end of the previous Administration, and has been furthered in the current Administration. In order to be most effective in deterring the Soviets, we must be able to convince them that they could not accomplish their objectives by attempting to carry out their nuclear war plans. In this Estimate we are doing the best we can to depict their views of nuclear war, and their war plans, and we are clear on the extent of our uncertainty about these plans. It is crucial for the President and for US policymakers to understand how the Soviets view nuclear war and their willingness to confront the unthinkable. Soviet political and military leaders seriously work on the problems of being able to fight in a nuclear war, if it should occur, and to do the best they can to prevail.

4. We are very clear in the Estimate (see paragraph 66) that we

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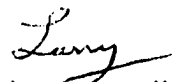
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cannot judge how the Soviets would assess their prospects for prevailing. On the other hand, we are also clear that the Soviets acquire forces and train to be able to prevail, if such a war should occur, and we judge that their efforts are serious enough and significant enough that they are better off as a result, that their chances of prevailing are enhanced.

5. A key issue is what is meant by winning or prevailing in such a war. It is apparent to all of us including the Soviets that we would all be losers in a nuclear war. It is also true, however, that after such a war the world will still be there. The Soviets would like to be in control of such a world, if nuclear war happens, and I would bet that we would also want to be in control, if it came to that. That is not to say that we or they, would be better off for having fought such a war. I believe the Soviets have the serious objective and intentions of prevailing in that sense, if a nuclear war occurs, but that they are smart enough not to seek such a war. They likely believe that nuclear war is possible, despite their intentions to avoid it, and they are facing up to this possibility.

6. It is not our own views we seek to deter, but rather those of the Soviets. If they believe it is possible to win in a nuclear war, then we must seek to convince them that they should have considerable uncertainty as to whether they could prevail, or better yet, to convince them that there is little chance they could prevail. We do not ourselves have to be convinced that we could prevail in a nuclear conflict in order to be able to convince the Soviets that they probably could not.



Lawrence K. Gershwin

Attachemt

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